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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9574
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0031
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0072
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000067

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [VE](#) [WI](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO CLOSES EMBASSY IN CARACAS, BUT CHAVEZ GAZA
STANCE WINS KUDOS

REF: CARACAS 00067

Classified By: Acting DCM Elisabeth Millard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Venezuela's decision to appoint an Ambassador to the POLISARIO's self-declared government-in-exile in Tindouf prompted Rabat to close its Embassy in Caracas, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Americas Director Fouad Yazorh confirmed to PolCouns on January 15. An MFA press release that day cited Venezuela's "growing hostility" toward Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and Caracas's support for the "phony" Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic as reasons behind the closure. Yazorh emphasized that Morocco and Venezuela would continue to maintain diplomatic relations, but a non-resident Ambassador would represent Rabat's interests. Although the staff of the now-closed Embassy had been transferred to Santo Domingo, Yazorh was uncertain whether representation would fall to the Moroccan Ambassador in Santo Domingo, or to one of the other Moroccan missions in Latin America. Yazorh will travel to Costa Rica and Mexico the week of January 26th in the hopes of rallying assistance in getting Chavez to back off representation in Tindouf, and support Morocco's position on the Western Sahara.

12. (SBU) The GOM announcement to close the mission in Venezuela comes at a time when the Moroccan press had been lauding the policies of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, particularly his decision to expel the Israeli Ambassador because of the conflict in Gaza. Venezuelan Charge d'Affaires Jose Clavijo Murzi told Poloff on January 14 that he had just received a busload of Moroccan MPs who had come to congratulate him on President Chavez's stance on Gaza. An open letter in the independent Arabic-language daily Al Massae called for "appointing Chavez as Caliph" of the Muslim nation. The letter praised Chavez for taking action on Gaza when Arab leaders had done nothing and claimed that this, coupled with his condemnation of Israel during the 2006 war with Lebanon, qualified him to be the Caliph. It turned out that the visiting MP's were only from the opposition, led by Islamist-oriented PJD party chief Benkirane, who quickly backtracked from a proposal to take a delegation to Caracas to thank Chavez, after being "reminded" of the Venezuelan stance on Sahara.

13. (C) Comment: Irked by Chavez's stance on Western Sahara, Morocco has intended to close its mission in Caracas for some time, but it was Venezuela's decision to appoint an Ambassador to Tindouf that pushed the GOM to act. The GOM had been lobbying Venezuela without success to support its position on the Western Sahara. Morocco's dedication to diplomatic persuasion, which has had success elsewhere in Latin America, will likely keep relations from full rupture.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

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